

A Marital Extravaganza

PEACHBLOW

By Rupert Hughes

The Author

Rupert Hughes

I first met Rupert Hughes several years ago. I sat next him at a dinner. Mr. Hughes was, then as now, very much in the limelight. His play, "Excuse Me," was creating widely popular comment. People were talking of how it made them laugh, and telling their friends, who went to see it and broadcasted their own pleasure. I was very much thrilled at being seated by so popular an author.

But Mr. Hughes did not talk at all about his own work. He asked me about mine, and told of how, once, when he was an editor, he had cut an author's story in a moment of stress to fill an exacting space, and how that author had minded. His feeling still, though this had happened years before, was one of real regret for that author's chagrin.

It is that quality of understanding the other fellow's feelings that gives him such a large hold on the American public.

I asked him last winter when he had first begun to write, and he said at the age of seven, and that he had been at it ever since. A short time after he left Yale he had had six months' experience on a newspaper. After that he had been an editor on various magazines until a little more than ten years ago, but that during those editorial years he had done a great amount of writing at night.

MARY STEWART CUTTING, JR.

EVEN if it had not been set down in Holy Writ for a fact, there would be no escaping the truth of: "To him that hath shall be given." In our dictionary "him," of course, includes "her." Which is more than he is able to do outside the dictionary.

This is a bit of a story of a her that had—and therefore got.

Her father was so stunned with pride when he saw her that he called her "Peachblow." And with good reason. She was born just about the time when the peachblow vase was exciting the world. The unknown artist who was the author of that masterpiece never dreamed when he put it in the fire that it would come out so wonderful.

And so the mysterious Potter who places souls in the furnace of human bodies was enchanted by the curious, unforeseen unintended beauty of this girl when she was born. There had selected the name of Ellen Anne Green for her before they saw her, but afterward they called her Peachblow.

Such a peculiar luster she had, with the glow of a glaze yet the aura of a mist, that the Potter longed to show her how he loved her by endowing her with some intentional gift surpassing even the fortuitous charm she brought with her out of the kiln of mystery.

So he gave her a power he had never even granted himself—that of annulling what had been and making it as if it had never been. He authorized her and empowered her to change her mind and try again from the start. She could rub out the past and do it over again!

She learned of her awful power only by accident and not until she had passed through the animal whims of childhood, and the parent-obeying, teacher-obeying, custom-obeying years.

Then she found herself in the world of grown-up women. They were thinking mainly about matrimony.

Some were not married and wanted to be, but dreaded it and could not find a satisfactory mate. Mates were admirable, adorable or advisable, but rarely all three at once. The women who were married seemed to be forever pointing out what martyrs they were and how well they stood it; or else were longing to try a new form of martyrdom with somebody else.

It was amazing to Peachblow to hear the women complaining of so many things in the wedded estate and yet all conspiring to decoy the unmarried ones into the trap that held them—like captured mice; like misery in love of company.

Peachblow vowed that she would never get married at all, but after a season or two of flying about with all sorts of lovers, and involving herself in various entangling alliances with two or three fiancés at once, she began to long for that ancient form of monotony known as monogamy.

She was a good girl at heart—as such a beauty had to be. For beauty cannot last long with an ugly soul fermenting and going sour inside, any more than an apple can entertain a worm or a rose a canker without a blemish finally transpiring.

Peachblow longed for the joys, the sorrows, the burdens of home. She wanted to do her share in the world; to multiply, and all that sort of thing.

"Love is so glorious a thing that I think I'd like to be loved by the loveliest lover in all the world."

She cast about for the person most worthy of that distinction.

The man who seemed to be the leading lover in respect to quantity and quality was known to all the world as Claude Winsor. So she said:

"I think I'll marry Claude Winsor."

Her father and mother exclaimed aloud:

"But he's a movie actor and he's married."

"The first argues skill," she mused, "but the second is an obstacle. I do wish he had never been married."

There was an audible click and buzz, a peculiar jolt in the universe, a dizzy feeling as if some one had thrown the world into the reverse gear, then set it back in high. The family said:

"That's funny! Did you notice anything?"

Then they forgot it and returned to the popular sport of denouncing the motion picture people and crediting them with inventing more novel sins than situations.

Peachblow was blue for several days, and then she chanced to read in the newspapers this:

"Mr. and Mrs. Claude Winsor announced that a curious error had been made in the public attitude toward their relationship.

"They have never been married,

never have lived together, never have been anything but friends, which they still are, and might not be if they had been married.

"The children that used to play in front of their bungalow are the children of a neighbor."

"Aha!" quoth Peachblow. "I will marry this bachelor." And immediately began to pack her trunk. She told her father to get her a stationer to Los Angeles and her mother to come along.

Her parents indulged in mental pin-wheels when they heard her decision.

BUT nothing could change Peachblow's mind. She went out to Los Angeles and sent one of her photographs to Mr. Winsor with a request for an interview. That photograph was better of introduction enough and she was invited to call at the great man's studio.

When she stood before his eyes he said:

"Do you want to go into the movies?"

"Well," she said, "I'm going to marry into them."

"Indeed? And who is the lucky man?"

"You."

"Really?"

"Uh-huh."

Being used to the silent drama and hating superfluous titles, he said nothing, but took her by an elbow, her mother by an elbow, hurried them out to his car, ran them to the nearest parson and said: "Shoot!"

The parson then did them an irreparable injury—or what would have been irreparable in the case of anybody but Peachblow.

For a time the marriage was happy and she reveled in the luxury of being loved by an expert. But then he went back to his profession, and mortification set in.

Peachblow found herself the chattel of a husband who left her arms early in the morning and hastened to the arms of other women; who fought for them, pursued them, risked his life to save their lives, gazed into their eyes with an ardor that transfixed all beholders; who faded out of every picture with a dying-duck look of undying affection for some highly artificial beauty—and then came home at night worn out with love and wanted to go to the American Legion prize fight.

After a few months Peachblow sent for her mother and father and listened to their "I told you so's" with great patience.

They agreed with her that life with such a husband was impossible, and engaged the best divorce lawyer in Los Angeles. While they were awaiting the inevitable newspaper horror, the headlines, and all the hideous details of divorce, Peachblow felt a renewal of her occult power.

"Divorce nothing!" she said; "I'll just forget him. I'll just unmarry myself quietly, and erase my memory from his mind."

She said this in the very presence of Mr. Winsor, who had called with his lawyer to confer with Peachblow, her parents and their lawyer, John Elphinstone.

As soon as Peachblow spoke, a curious look came over Claude Winsor's face. Again the earth jolted and spun backward, then raced forward once more.

"It's nothing," said Mr. Elphinstone, "but one of our little California earthquakes. Quite nothing at all."

He slipped his arm about Peachblow to sustain her, and found the attitude singularly comfortable. Together they watched Claude Winsor staring at them with a look of bewilderment. Then he bowed and said:

"Pardon me, I entered the wrong set—house, by mistake."

He staggered out and the next thing he knew he was sitting on his porch dandling his baby before his original wife, while the publicity man took snapshots for the magazines.

Mr. Elphinstone clung to Peachblow until her father intervened and said:

"What right have you to stand there embracing my daughter as if you were announcing your engagement to her?"

"And why not?" said Elphinstone. "I see no objection."

Peachblow, who felt a sudden emptiness in her life. "After all, who could make a better husband than a lawyer?"

And so in a short time expensively engraved cards conveyed the information that Mr. and Mrs. Greene announced the marriage of their daughter, Ellen Anne, to John Elphinstone, esquire.

THOSE who have experienced it say that there is nothing like being the wife of a lawyer. For a time Peachblow agreed with this in its simplest implication; then she amended it to:

"There's nothing like it because nothing else could be so bad."

She had a husband who tore himself from her society of mornings and went forth to do battle for woman clients over whose wrecked lives he talked so eloquent that his tears were rivet by those of the jury, and strong judges bent their heads and wept secretly on the papers where judges make idle marks to pass away the time.

Elphinstone not only spent hours upon hours in his office with exclusive clients, whose hands he patted and whose charms he expatiated on before the courts, but he came home and told his wife about it.

He wrote briefs as impassioned and as full of imaginations as any scenario, and then acted his own contumacious with frey enthusiasm. His cases often took him to distant cities and it was not always convenient for Peachblow to go with him.

There was such a strain upon her natural jealousy that she had to consult a physician, Dr. S. Q. Lapius, who had a charming bedside manner and soothed her by suggestion rather than by knife or nostrum.

After one notorious lawsuit in which Elphinstone wore himself almost to a wreck by his defense of a wayward lady who had bankrupted her husband and then sued him for alienation of her affections, Elphinstone came home to find his mother and father-in-law and the physician trying to restrain Peachblow's hysterics. When Elphinstone approached her, she suddenly she covered her

face with her hands and sobbed.

"You're actually insane over dancing! I'll confess that, if I were, I should look for a partner like him. But for dancing only. Otherwise not my style."

"I wonder who he is? There's

something strangely familiar in his style, yet I can't place him. Must have met him—or seen him—long ago."

"I never met him. He must be a regular person, though, for I saw him at Mrs. Delmont's the other evening, and he was at Mrs. Thomas' last week. At both places he seemed to be dancing endlessly—and most of the time with Miss Strong!"

"Well, dear, I must meet him—just for a dance!" And Mrs. Manfred sought Mrs. Strong for an introduction to the marvel who had involved her imagination. She found that lady alertly watching her daughter's movements with the young man.

"Who is he?" Mrs. Manfred asked.

"Hubert Bell. Seems a charming fellow, in a way, although I don't really know him," replied Mrs. Strong. "You don't mean that?"

"Candidly, my dear, he was not invited," Mrs. Strong whispered. "But I've seen him at so many places, among the very best people, that really he must belong. I don't care to have Eleanor dance with him—don't like to encourage him, you know—until I can make inquiries. But he is such a dancer! And Eleanor is obsessed. She has danced with him at several places, and my talking to her seems useless. It's all right, don't you think?"



"WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU DOING IN THE KITCHEN, MY DARLING?"

the bosom of the doctor and screamed:

"Go away, you are no longer a husband of mine, in fact, you never were."

Elphinstone was seized as by invisible hands and haled backward to his own office, where he awoke with a splitting headache and a strange gap in his memory.

Peachblow, once more miraculously restored to maidenhood, said: "After all, a doctor is the world's most useful citizen. I believe I should enjoy being a wife to one."

"Barkis is willin'," said the physi-

cian, who was unusually well read for a doctor. He persuaded another physician to take care of his patients and went away on a bridal tour of all imaginable bliss.

WHEN he came back Dr. Lapius found that his overworked substitute had let all his patients get so much better that Peachblow grew frantic with suspicion. She remembered all too vividly how gentle and soothing her husband had been with her when she was another man's wife. And she wondered, till her wonderful growth to be a bitter conviction. Worst yet, he was the slave of the

tain her friends in the upstairs living room.

The acoustics were such that she could hear what went on in the office. The hales and heartiest women constantly entered the parlor in a state of acute distress and after long murmurous consultations went away so much better that Peachblow grew frantic with suspicion. She remembered all too vividly how gentle and soothing her husband had been with her when she was another man's wife. And she wondered, till her wonderful growth to be a bitter conviction. Worst yet, he was the slave of the

telephone. At no hour of the day or night was he safe from the hateful summons to hurry to the rescue of some distressed patient. In nine cases out of ten it was a woman, and in no cases out of ten was Peachblow ever urged to come along.

She so lost her taste for material medicaments that she longed for spiritual help, and went to her rector, dear Dr. Clarence Yost, to confess her misery.

She was set upon a divorce, but he was horrified at the thought.

"Now an annulment would not be so bad," he urged.

"All right, it's annulled," she Peachblow grimly.

And Dr. Lapius found himself back in bachelorhood. But Peachblow had come to depend upon Dr. Yost. He lived in such an exalted sphere and such a comfortable paragonage that she decided to share both with him.

IV.

TO her intense confusion Peachblow discovered that the feminine portion of the congregation took her marriage to their dear rector as a personal invasion of their rights.

For a time the attendance fell off noticeably. But gradually the lonely women returned to their pews. Next they resumed their habits of bringing their woes to their spiritual adviser.

These were genuine woes beyond the reach of scalpel or tonic, but Peachblow could not regard them as anything but a hypocritical excuse for weeping on her husband's shoulder and clinging to his rescuing hands.

Whether or not she did them a cruel injustice, the effect on her nerves was manifest. At last in a crisis of unhappiness, she stormed:

"I'm sick of all the professions. I'm going into trade."

She unwisely herself from Dr. Yost and he once more assumed all the charms of an unwedded clergyman, eligible and available.

V.

A MERCHANT was Peachblow's next first husband; handsome junior member of the firm of Wansfield & Son, at whose great department store she had long run up bills for her father to protest against and pay.

But when she called at his office she found him so surrounded with stenographers, buyers, manikins, cloak models, designers and other woman customers and aides that she could hardly get to him.

His heart was given to providing as many women as possible with beautiful garments and embellishments of every sort, with perfumes and rib-

bons and lipsticks and what not. He thought about fashions and he was so weary of feminine charms and their enchantment that when he came home to his Peachblow he left at once for one of his exclusively male clubs in order to keep his sanity.

A small shoeshop man was Peachblow's next experiment. But when she went by his store and pecked in at the window she always found him kneeling before some woman, or trying to crush a No. 6 shoe into a No. 4 shoe, and she simply could not endure it.

VI.

A PLUMBER who married was forever putting about other people's homes in the most personal crannies, and she gave him up.

An iceman followed him through her much trodden heart, but he, too, had his kitchen doors to visit.

Discouraged by her inability to find a husband in town who did not have to spend a large part of his time and attention upon other women, Peachblow resolved to marry some homely old farmer who lived in solitude.

Extra Hepple was the happy man—for a time. And he was so content with Peachblow's society that he would not even keep a hired girl to cook for the hired men.

He rose at 4 a.m., and bragged about it. He woke her up by brag about it. The fact that he had gone to sleep at dusk did not abate his pride. The only poetry he knew was something ending with "healthy, wealthy and wise." She knew he was neither wealthy nor wise, but she was afraid he was healthy.

Her jealous little soul had its wish at last.

But a wish ceases to be a wish as soon as it is achieved. Like the candy in the bonbon dish, it is apt not only to turn sour, but to wreck the appetite as well.

Peachblow's latest installment in her serial husband never cast an interested eye on any other woman. But this curiosity made his interest in her unimportant, robbed him of suspense and her of the drama of anxiety. He was unskilled, uncouth, illiterate in femininity.

No other woman cast an eye in his direction. But that was because he had nothing attractive about him. And the man who is unable to interest any other woman is unable to interest his wife.

Poor Peachblow, having no rivals to fear and having a husband who made no perilous comparisons, began to neglect herself. Her beauty wilted from lack of attention. Her incomparable complexion began to yield to farm food and farm labor in farm weather.

She sighed: "It doesn't seem to make much difference what man a woman marries, every one of the brutes has his own special way of being impossible."

By this time Peachblow had so disorganized the machinery of the universe that the world was in the garage half the time, and all the angels exhausted. It is not such an easy matter for

even the angels to keep everything going, especially when it goes backward frequently. There was talk of a strike in heaven and celestial society was profoundly disturbed. The oldest angels were forever talking of the last big revolution when Lucifer and his whole party were thrown overboard.

But how was the dreadful situation to be changed? The Lord did not want to cancel one of His own generous gifts to one of the most beautiful creatures. But heaven was ceasing to be heaven for all its deserving tenants of bliss.

At the height of this dreadful comic crisis, Peachblow in a frenzy and state of despondency, while slaving in her kitchen, chanced to catch a glimpse of herself in the casual mirror in the round bottom of a big dishpan. She had long ceased to peruse her own looking-glass.

The vision that stared at her from that tiny surface shocked her into a sorrow too deep for hysterics. She meditated on her own image:

"Every husband is worse than every other husband. A woman might as well stick to the first wretch she happens to marry. I was luckiest when I had the most lovable of men, and I wish I had him back again, movie actor though he be."

"This hateful power of mine has been my ruin. It's best to let nature take her course. The one thing I most wish had never been in my ability to make things as if they never had been."

As she exhaled this last sigh, a distinct earthquake was registered on every seismograph in the world. The heavens shook, at first with surprise, then with delight.

Peachblow herself was shaken. She found herself staring at a dishpan as if under a hypnotic spell. She heard her husband's voice from the dining room door. It was the voice of Claude Winsor, the star supreme of the cinematic firmament. The world might share his silent beauty with her, but his voice belonged to her:

"What on earth are you doing in the kitchen, my darling? It's no place for such exquisite grace. And, besides, I see that there's a ton of fan mail that you haven't answered. You haven't autographed any of my photographs for me in ever so long. We've got to get busy or we'll lose our little public."

With a cry of rapture she flung her arms about his universally admired neck, and rejoiced in the fact that at least a hundred million women of all ages and races about the globe would have been glad to poison her for her enviable privilege.

The moral, if any, has to do with leaping out of the frying pan into the fire. The moral is ancient—the very first of old time cooking advice: blaze of discontent. But the frying pan is forever new. Each one of us furnishes his or her own frying pan. Selah!

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A Modern Open Sesame.

BY J. A. WALDRON.



"WHEN THE BAND PLAYED AGAIN, MRS. MANFRED AND MR. BELL JOINED THE DANCERS."

THE summer season—usually a silly period—was in full swing at Harbor Bar. This resort, long in vogue among the socially elect, had a fresh allotment of climbers—they were numerous in every notable summer place—for war fortunes had to be exhibited in fashionable circumstances.

A dance was in progress at the new and showy home of the Strongs, who were simply well-to-do before the war, but who now were leaders of the high jinks, anxious to display their apparently endless resources.

Mrs. Manfred and Mrs. Pelham, young society women, quite intimate considering their contrasting trends and the former was frivolous and the latter sedate—were late arrivals, and dancing was in progress. They entered the ballroom together, and surveyed the moving throng.

"Who is that chap?" Mrs. Manfred asked.

"What chap, dear?" responded Mrs. Pelham. "There are quite a number of chaps in sight."

"The tall fellow dancing with Miss Strong. What a dancer! I must meet him."

"You're actually insane over dancing! I'll confess that, if I were, I should look for a partner like him. But for dancing only. Otherwise not my style."

"I wonder who he is? There's

something strangely familiar in his style, yet I can't place him. Must have met him—or seen him—long ago."</